

Children's Environmental Health Center of the Hudson Valley

New York Medical College, Valhalla, New York 10595

P: 914-493-7585 F: 914-594-2350

CHILDREN'S ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH CENTER OF THE HUDSON VALLEY

PROTECTING CHILDREN AGAINST ENVIRONMENTAL THREATS

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Enterovirus D68: What Parents Need to Know

OCTOBER 4, 2014: Enteroviruses are incredibly common, every year they cause about 10-15 million infections. If you've ever had a summer cold, it could have been caused by an Enterovirus. Enterovirus D68, or EV-D68, is one of many non-polio enteroviruses and until now it has only been tied to smaller clusters of disease around the U.S. It was first reported in 1962 in California. We're hearing a lot more about it because of a recent increase in the number of children catching it. In late August 2014, Children's Mercy Hospital in Kansas City, Mo., began seeing an unusual number of children experiencing respiratory problems, and the number of cases rapidly grew as the disease spread to six states in less than one month. By the end of September, 2014, kids all over the country have become infected. The virus that is making hundreds of children very sick, sometimes sending them to hospitals with severe coughing and trouble breathing may also just cause regular upper respiratory tract infections or the "common cold." Like many viruses, infections can range from virtually asymptomatic to causing respiratory symptoms and even sometimes GI symptoms such as nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. As of this writing, there has been some concern that a small number of children are also developing worrisome neurological symptoms. At this point, it is just too soon to know if this is going to turn out to be a big problem or not.

According to Allen J. Dozor, MD, chief of pediatric pulmonology at Children's and Women's Physicians of Westchester, the Maria Fareri Children's Hospital at Westchester Medical Center and New York Medical College, the risk factors are always the same: Age and a history of asthma. Young children have particular trouble with this and other infections because their

immune system is immature, their bronchial tubes are skinny, and infections spread easily through families and communities every fall, particularly when kids go back to school.

Here is what parents need to know:

What are the symptoms of EV-D68 infection?

Kids with D68 infections typically have symptoms similar to the common cold. However, they may on occasion develop trouble breathing, sometimes with wheezing if they have underlying respiratory illnesses like asthma. Children with weaker immune systems, such as newborns, may experience more severe respiratory problems.

How does the virus spread?

Since EV-D68 causes respiratory illness, the virus can be found in an infected person's respiratory secretions, such as saliva, nasal mucus, or sputum. EV-D68 likely spreads from person-to-person when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or touches contaminated surfaces.

What is the best treatment?

There is no specific treatment for people with respiratory illness caused by EV-D68. Because it is caused by a virus, and not bacteria, antibiotics don't help. For mild respiratory illness, you can help relieve symptoms by taking over-the-counter medications for pain and fever and by drinking enough fluids to prevent dehydration. Check with your pediatrician for his or her recommendations. Only those with severe respiratory illness may need to be hospitalized.

How can you reduce the risk of infection?

- Wash your hands often and teach your children to do the same. Use plain old soap and water, and wash for at least 20 seconds. Carry hand sanitizer when you are out and about and away from sinks.
- If your child has asthma or any other lung disease, make sure he is taking all medications as prescribed, especially any "controller" medications used to prevent symptoms. Parents understandably don't like to give daily medications such as inhalers to their children when they appear well. But if your child's asthma doctors have made that recommendation, now's the time to take it seriously.
- Don't share cups or utensils, and frequently wipe down toys and shared surface like doorknobs.
- Keep a reasonable distance from sick people. Save the hugging and kissing for when they are better. Don't let sick people hold or care for your baby, to the extent that's

possible. And if you or family members are feeling sick, stay home. It's better for everyone.

- Teach your children to cover coughs and sneezes with the inside of the elbow or a tissue, not the hand.
- Disinfect frequently touched surfaces, such as toys and doorknobs, especially if someone is sick.

Is there a vaccine?

No, not yet. There are no vaccines for preventing EV-D68 infections. But remember that the flu is perhaps the most dangerous respiratory infection out there, and that's the one viral infection that can be prevented. It is possible that children who catch the flu this winter will be much sicker with it if they are just recovering from enterovirus D68 or other respiratory viral infections this fall. So, make sure everyone in your family gets a flu shot

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